

23. POSSIBLE NEW RECORD OF *STURNUS MALABARICUS BLYTHII*
IN VALSAD DISTRICT, GUJARAT

Atul Ltd. lies about 80 km south of Surat (Gujarat) and 200 km north of Mumbai, in Valsad district, Gujarat (South). It is a wellknown, large industrial complex for the manufacture of chemicals of colours, dyes and pesticides. On August 15, 1999 between 0630 hrs and 0830 hrs, we visited Atul Limited to survey a heronry located in the complex. We recorded 9 species of water birds in the heronry, and 20 or 21 other species in the whole complex.

We observed quite a large number of birds of genus *Sturnus* under the roofs of the factory sheds, where steel columns were being used as their roosting sites. Flocks of different sizes were leaving the complex for their foraging sites when we reached the complex early in the morning.

Our attention was drawn to the different species in the flocks of mynas. They were cheeping noisily perched on the canopy of one of the beef wood trees *Casuarina equisetifolia* in the complex. We observed them for at least half an hour, before they flew away to the west towards the estuary of the Par river. They were smaller in size and sleeker in body shape than the other mynas, and had conspicuous whitish head and neck.

Through our binoculars, the body appeared overall grey on the upper parts, and on the underparts there was rufous on the belly and flanks, with a contrasting bright white head, nape, neck and breast area. With the help of the

COMPACT HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (second edition) and BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT, we confirmed that the species we saw was the white-headed subspecies *blythii* of the grey-headed starling *Sturnus malabaricus*.

We counted a total of 75-80 birds of *Sturnus malabaricus blythii* in a single flock, along with 1,000+ common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), 100+ bank myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*), 40-45 Brahminy myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*) and 20-25 rosy starling (*Sturnus roseus*).

The occurrence of 75-80 individuals is the largest number of *S. malabaricus blythii* recorded from Gujarat in recent years. Dr. Sálím Ali, during his survey of the birds of Gujarat (*JBNHS* 52: 374-458, 735-802, 1954-1955) had collected one specimen of *S.m. blythii* from Ajwa-Vadodara district. There are two other published references on the occurrence of this subspecies from Gujarat. B.M. Parasharya and S.N. Varu (see page 531 of this issue) report that this subspecies is a regular visitor to Gujarat. They believe that one recorded nesting by M.K. Himmatsinhji might also be *S.m. blythii*.

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24. *STURNUS MALABARICUS BLYTHII* IN GUJARAT STATE

The white-headed subspecies *blythii* of the grey-headed starling *Sturnus malabaricus* was recently sighted at a few places in Gujarat State. One bird was observed feeding on sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) grains from a standing crop at Anand during February 1992 (BMP). On June 10, 1996, 50+ birds were observed feeding on ripened fruits of neem *Azadirachta indica* at

Kevdi village on the outskirts of Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary (BMP). One pair was observed regularly entering a cavity of a mahua *Madhuca indica* tree on July 13, 1999 at Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary. The pair may have been engaged in breeding activity.

One of us (SNV) had seen a single bird in April 1980 in the Gir Forest. On March 28, 1999,

one bird was recorded at Loriya Village of Bhuj tehsil, Kutch.

At least three specimens of *S.m. blythii* have been collected from Gujarat. During his bird survey of Gujarat, Dr. Sálim Ali collected a specimen on October 29, 1945 at Ajwa, Vadodara district (Ali 1954). In the BNHS museum, there are two specimens one collected from Ajwa, Vadodara district and another from Valsad district (Abdulali 1978). Ali and Ripley (1983) mentioned that one specimen of this subspecies was collected from Ahmedabad too, however, they did not refer to Ali (1954) or to Abdulali (1978). Recently, Patel *et al.* (1999) observed 70-80 birds of *S.m. blythii* on August 15, 1999 at Atul, Valsad. (see page 531 of this issue)

Earlier, Himmatsinhji (1970) recorded four *Sturnus malabaricus* near Mandvi, Kutch and a nesting pair near Wankaner (Surendranagar district). However, he did not specify the subspecies. His description of the female of the nesting pair indicates that it might be *S.m. blythii*. Without naming the subspecies, Monga and Naoroji (1984) reported 30 birds near Timba, 75 km north of Vadodara. They have also reported a nesting pair in June near Vadodara. Mehta *et al.* (2000) had observed 400-500 birds every April between 1980 and 1984 in the Gir Forest (subspecies not mentioned). None of the specimens of *S.m. malabaricus* was collected

from Gujarat (Abdulali 1978).

There are very few sight records of this species from Gujarat during the last 55 years. Dharmakumarsinhji (1954) in BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA did not list the species. It is never seen regularly anywhere in Gujarat, indicating seasonal movement (Ali and Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Two nesting records from Gujarat (present report and that of Himmatsinhji) are noteworthy. It is evident that the distribution of *S.m. blythii* given by Ali and Ripley (1983) and Grimmett *et al.* (1998) needs revision. The species that occurs and also breeds in Gujarat is *S.m. blythii*.

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